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## Article Review 99

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**Amanda J. Rothschild. “Rousing a Response: When the United States Changes Policy toward Mass Killing.”** *International Security* 42:2 (Fall 2017): 120-154. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_A\\_00295](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_A_00295).

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Over the last year, the mass killing and ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar has become a major international issue. More than 700,000 Rohingya have fled from the Rakhine state, the death toll exceeded 10,000 in a four month period from August to December 2017 alone, and policymakers and United Nations (UN) experts have been moving towards calling the situation a genocide.<sup>1</sup> In the U.S., Congress, the State Department, and public pressure has begun to mount over whether the U.S. response—thus far a combination of congressional hearings, humanitarian assistance, and withdrawal of aid to the military—warrants a shift.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Kristof, “Is This a Genocide?” *New York Times*, 15 December 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/15/opinion/sunday/genocide-myanmar-rohingya-bangladesh.html>; Barb Wilkinson, “UN Official Convinced of Myanmar Rohingya ‘Genocide’,” *CNN*, 12 March 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/12/asia/myanmar-rohingya-un-violence-genocide-intl/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Hearing, “The Rohingya Crisis: U.S. Response to the Tragedy in Burma,” 5 October 2017, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing/hearing-rohingya-crisis-u-s-response-tragedy-burma/>; “U.S. assistance in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh,” *ReliefWeb*, 17 November 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/us-assistance-response-rohingya-refugee-crisis-bangladesh-enbn-0>; “US withdraws assistance from Myanmar military amid Rohingya crisis,” *The Guardian*, 24 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/24/us-withdraws-assistance-from-myanmar-military-amid-rohingya-crisis>.

According to Amanda J. Rothschild's new article, "Rousing a Response: When the United States Changes Policy Towards Mass Killing," there have, historically, been certain conditions that need to be present in order for these types of major policy shifts to occur in the face of mass atrocity. Rothschild develops a "generalizable theory" for analyzing how and why the U.S. moves from a "limited response to state-sponsored mass killing" to "more robust measures" (121). Focusing on nonmilitary responses, primarily defined as diplomatic, humanitarian, and economic options, she uses an impressive array of government documents to explore debates within high level policy circles to gain a better idea of when these shifts occur. Her conclusion is that there are three main factors that determine whether the U.S. will change course: dissent within the government, the degree of congressional pressure, and the direction of presidential political cost for inaction.

The article analyzes two primary cases to illustrate her point. In the first case, Rothschild offers an in-depth case study of the Holocaust and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's shift from ignoring the crisis during the period of 1938-1943 to the creation of the War Refugee Board in January 1944 as a first major response to Nazi atrocities. The shift took place after the three factors she identifies materialized. Placing Treasury Secretary Henry J. Morgenthau at the center of the government's organizing efforts, Rothschild first explains how he led dissent within Roosevelt's inner circle to expose purposeful delays and roadblocks within the State Department to finally push Roosevelt to make a change in his policy. Second, Rothschild highlights congressional action in the latter part of the war, including a unanimous resolution condemning Nazi atrocities, the 1943 Gillette-Rogers Resolution to establish a government commission devoted to rescue, and public hearings about the mass killings (142-144). Third, the article focuses on political liability, arguing that Roosevelt realized that inaction would only serve to increase criticism from Congress and shine light on the State Department—and by extension Roosevelt and his administration—for willfully ignoring the issue in spite of increased evidence of the Nazis' crimes (147). Based on thorough archival research at the Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman presidential libraries, as well as the Library of Congress, Rothschild's article argues that these three factors all needed to be present to produce Roosevelt's policy shift towards rescue in the form of the War Refugee Board in January 1944.

The article then moves on to examine the shadow case of Bosnia in 1995, a less thorough analysis but one that also focuses on the three-factor theory of policy shifts. Here, Rothschild puts emphasis on U.S. Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright's dissent about U.S. inaction in the Balkans, congressional pressure led by Senator Robert Dole, and possible political damage about the failure of U.S. to prevent atrocities that had a high likelihood of becoming major news at the height of President Bill Clinton's reelection campaign (149-151). She contends that in this case, the three factors led to an actual military response rather than a focus on diplomatic or economic responses as occurred during World War II. Here, the article argues that these conditions helped convince Clinton to bomb Serbian targets throughout Bosnia to stop atrocities in August 1995.

The article concludes that these case studies are the first step in showing a broader theory of what motivates U.S. policy shifts in response to mass killings. The author acknowledges that in her analysis all three factors need to be present, which can take a long time to occur, as evidenced by the length of time in each case study for action on the part of the president to emerge. In both Europe during World War II and with the Balkans, the violence had been going on for at least four years before the U.S. had a major policy shift (152). Rothschild also points to the importance of analyzing dissent within policy circles—following a recent trend

in historical literature by Hannah Gurman, Seth Jacobs, and David Mayers.<sup>3</sup> It is this avenue, as well as the thorough analysis of the policy debates behind the creation of the War Refugee Board, where Rothschild's argument makes its most important contributions to literature about mass killings.

In a short article, it is hard to know how generalizable the theory truly is. Rothschild is working on a book about the topic that will provide an expanded theoretical examination with further case studies.<sup>4</sup> Until then, the theory provides an opportunity and direction for more research but also suffers from a lack of historical and contextual factors that might limit its application elsewhere. For example, in developing her theory, Rothschild looks at two limited cases where the U.S. already had troops on the ground, which is not the case in most cases of state-sponsored mass killing. The research also does not account for major shifts in attitudes between the 1940s and the 1990s, where there were significant normative changes about humanitarian intervention and international responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Further, the two chosen cases rely exclusively on European case studies rather than any number of state-sponsored mass killings across Africa and Asia where race plays an additional factor in policy responses from the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Readers will also be left with questions about other factors that can limit the generalizable nature from the initial case study in a twenty-first century context, not least of which includes pressure on the U.S. from multilateral diplomatic initiatives either through the UN with the advent of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine or coalition-led commitments like that which occurred with Libya. Both of these factors also could have played a role in contributing to U.S. policy shifts, or the lack thereof, in the last twenty years.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these issues, the article provides an important departure for discussion and further research. Scholars who study U.S. responses to the Holocaust and overall humanitarian policy during World War II will find Rothschild's discussion of the War Refugee Board particularly interesting. Further, as dissent within the State Department becomes a bigger issue during the Donald Trump administration, researching the importance of

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<sup>3</sup> Hannah Gurman, "The Other Plumbers Unit: The Dissent Channel of the U.S. State Department," *Diplomatic History* 35:2 (April 2011): 321-349; Hannah Gurman, *The Dissent Papers: The Voices of Diplomats in the Cold War and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Seth Jacobs, *Rogue Diplomats: The Proud Tradition of Disobedience in American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); David Mayers, *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Amanda J. Rothschild, "The American Presidency in Response to Mass Atrocity," Personal Website, accessed 16 March 2018 at <http://www.amandajrothschild.com/book-manuscript.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016); Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Garth Myers and Thomas Klak, "The Inscription of Difference: News Coverage of Conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia," *Political Geography* 15:1 (1996): 21-46.

<sup>7</sup> James Pattison, *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility To Protect: Who Should Intervene?* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); James Pattison, "The Ethics of Humanitarian Intervention in Libya," *Ethics & International Affairs* 25:3 (2011): 271-277; Simon Chesterman, "'Leading from Behind': The Responsibility to Protect, the Obama Doctrine, and Humanitarian Intervention after Libya," *Ethics & International Affairs* 25:3 (2011): 279-285.

dissent channels and possibilities for influence will be increasingly important for scholars who write about policy shifts.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, if these three factors *are* necessary for policy shifts, it could provide a way forward for those in Congress and in the Administration who are increasingly concerned with reports coming out of Myanmar and Bangladesh about the Rohingya during this precarious moment in the region's history.

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<sup>8</sup> Nate Jones, Tom Blanton, and Emma Sarfity, eds., "Department of State's Dissent Channel Revealed," *National Security Archive*, 15 March 2018, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/foia/2018-03-15/departments-states-dissent-channel-revealed>.